



Fact Sheet

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Hepatitis B

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus. Symptoms may include fever, lack of energy, nausea, vomiting, abdominal discomfort, and jaundice (yellow color to the whites of the eyes or skin and darkening of urine). Some persons who have hepatitis B, particularly younger children, have no symptoms. A small number of hepatitis B infections are rapidly fatal. Although most infected persons recover completely, some develop chronic, long-term hepatitis B (carriers) and can spread this infection. Cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and liver failure are serious risks with this disease, but may take decades to develop.

Where does it come from?

Hepatitis B is a disease of humans. Acute hepatitis B infection is usually followed by complete recovery but the infection may become chronic and causes symptoms for years. An infected person with no symptoms can still spread hepatitis B to others.

How common is hepatitis B?

There are 100 to 200 newly diagnosed acute hepatitis B cases in Washington each year and an estimated 20,000 persons chronically infected.

How is it spread?

The virus is spread by direct contact with the blood, serum, or sexual fluids of an infected person. This can happen by sharing needles or having sex with somebody infected with hepatitis B. Transmission can also occur for people living together for a long time in the same household or institution. Infected women can pass the virus to their babies. Blood is now tested before transfusion to prevent spreading hepatitis B but in the past some cases resulted from blood transfusion. Medical personnel are at risk of exposure due to needle sticks.

Is there a vaccine available?

Yes, there is a three dose vaccine for hepatitis B. A dose is given at day 1, one to two months later, and a final dose six months after the first.

What is the treatment?

For acute HBV infection: rest and avoiding liver toxins including alcohol. For chronic HBV infection and some degrees of cirrhosis: specific antiviral drugs. Treatment requires care from a liver disease specialist. End stage liver disease: transplantation.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Usually within 60 to 90 days of infection, but can take as long as six months.

How can infected persons prevent the spread of hepatitis B?

- ❖ Do not share any blood testing devices, needles, or drug equipment.
- ❖ Do not donate blood or organs.
- ❖ Do not share razors, toothbrushes, nail care devices, or any other personal items that might have your blood on them.
- ❖ Let health care professionals who may be exposed to your blood know that you have hepatitis B.
- ❖ If you are chronically infected, recommend that everybody in your household be vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- ❖ If you are chronically infected, recommend that any regular sexual partner be vaccinated for hepatitis B, and always use latex condoms or barriers for any unvaccinated partners.
- ❖ Cover cuts or open sores on your skin.
- ❖ Infected mothers should make sure their babies receive hepatitis B immunoglobulin and three doses of hepatitis B vaccine.

What should I do if I suspect someone in my family has hepatitis B?

Contact your primary health care provider or call your [local health department](#).

Where can I get more information?

For more information call the Immunization Program, (360) 236-3595 or Communicable Disease Epidemiology, (206) 418-5500 or toll-free 877-539-4344.

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